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The Difficult Whole

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The Difficult Whole

TYPOLOGY AND THE SINGULARITY OF THE URBAN EVENT
IN ALDO ROSSI'S EARLY THEORETICAL WORK. 1953–1964.

Every program is independent of its failure.

– Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, 1980.

Near the end of *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Robert Venturi writes, “An architecture of Complexity and Contradiction does not forsake the whole.”¹ Venturi recognizes that it is a commitment to the whole, not the relativity of a liberated fragment, which characterizes a formal, complex, and contradictory architectural language. A *difficult whole*, “because the whole is difficult to achieve.”² The degree of difficulty of the whole is determined by the number of its parts. For Venturi, given a range from one to several, duality itself – two parts – is an aspiration to a difficult unity.

This idea of the difficult whole contributes to a reading of Aldo Rossi's architectural theory, the complexity of which cannot be explained by reducing it to a totalizing concept, like disciplinary autonomy, or by resorting to a vague notion of multidisciplinary. While for Venturi the difficult whole is a compositional device, in Rossi this idea represents the formal and political understanding of the relationship between the city and architecture.

Rossi's theoretical contribution might be best situated in the difficult duality established by the pivotal ideas that emerged from his views on architecture and the city. One is the concept of *typology* as a *generalizing* view of the city and its process of becoming, and the other is the concept of the *singularity of the urban event*³ as a concrete category of the architecture of the city.

Rossi puts these antithetical concepts into a difficult, complex, and problematic relationship that is at the core of his thought: the impossible relationship between *analysis* and *project*, or between personal invention – the scale of the architectural event – and the identification of a collective horizon – at the scale of the city. To state it simply, the concept of typology tries to include the city in all of its dimensions, while the urban event highlights the singularity of the architectural intervention as a partial, concrete, and identifiable contribution to the development of the city.

1. Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, 1966), 88.
2. Ibid.
3. I prefer the translation of *individualità del fatto urbano* as “singularity of the urban event,” rather than “individuality of the urban artifact,” which was used in the American translation of Aldo Rossi's *L'architettura della città*. An urban artifact presupposes an already materialized object-form crafted with an artistic intention. Though Rossi would also have interpreted *fatto urbano* as a materialized object-form, I believe that “urban event” refers more directly to what was at stake in Rossi's view on the architecture of the city; namely, the event – whether as a political decision or collective will – that makes legible the evolution of the city by disrupting the continuity through which it forms itself. See Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, trans. Diane Ghirardo and Joan Ockman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1982).

What is the meaning of this complex and often contradictory duality, of this “difficult whole” that is not always resolved in a clear dialectic, even if one is strongly suggested by the rational economy of the urban project?

I maintain that the difficult whole in Rossi’s early work is the attempt to be in radical continuity with the theoretical tension expressed by the Modern Movement, while simultaneously recognizing the irreducibility of urban complexity and subjective experience to easy common denominators.

To support this hypothesis, I will make a critical analysis of the formative path that led to Rossi’s contribution to typological studies. This path covers the period between 1953, the year in which his first article was published, and 1964, the year in which he wrote his first extensive essays on typology. This analysis is a very selective one, focusing mainly on those aspects that have been overshadowed by Rossi’s best known theoretical work. This period has never been thoroughly analyzed, either then or today, even though it represents the most important, intense, and complex part of Rossi’s theoretical development.

Rossi’s formative years can be divided into three significant phases. During the first phase, from 1953 to 1957, Rossi wrote several essays in which he began to form a *realist* attitude toward history and social, political, and cultural development. As Carlo Olmo has remarked, Rossi’s first interventions are made through “continuous shifts of meaning, all based on the deepening of the concept of tradition.”⁴ Rossi often identified the concept of *tradition* with the concept of *reality* in order to understand tradition not as “subjugation to the formal world expressed by antiquity,”⁵ but as reason applied to reality in order to extrapolate lines of structural continuity that could contribute to a more conscious perception of the present.

The second phase, from 1958 to 1963, in which Rossi’s work was mostly reviews and monographic essays, represents a period of broad and complex research, at times fragmented, on methods for a general discourse on architecture and the city. This phase, which coincides with his collaboration with the magazine *Casabella Continuità*, is the period of Rossi’s education, mythicized by scholars, and often read superficially. Here, Rossi moves through a vast and strongly transdisciplinary theoretical landscape – from urban planning to literature, from art to sociology, from urban geography to economy, from philosophy to an accurate analysis of canonical architectural works – which addressed the programmatic needs of the emerging postwar city.

4. Carlo Olmo, “Attraverso i testi”, in *Aldo Rossi, opere* (Modena: Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990), 85.

5. Aldo Rossi, “Il concetto di tradizione nell’architettura neoclassica milanese,” *Società*, n. 3 (1956). Reprinted in Aldo Rossi, *Scritti Scelti sull’architettura e la città, 1956–1972*, Rosalo Bonicalzi, ed. (Milan: Città Studi Edizioni, 1975), 4.

FOR ROSSI, THE MOVE FROM NEO-REALISM TO REALISM IN FILM WAS EPITOMIZED IN LUCHINO VISCONTI'S *SENZO*, 1954. STILL FROM A SCENE SHOT IN LA FENICE, WHERE ARCHITECTURE IS A BACKDROP FOR HUMANITY.



The third phase, from 1964 to 1966, includes his first attempt to define typological studies through research and programmatic interventions, concluding in the analytical attempt to found a *theory* of the city. Rossi is influenced by the studies of the French school of urban geography, which is mentioned repeatedly in Rossi's later book, *L'Architettura della città*, and, above all, by the research on *type* as an a priori synthesis conducted by Saverio Muratori in the 1950s and '60s. While Rossi never precisely defined the concept of type, it clearly emerges that it is not architecture as image, that is, a merely perceptive fact; rather, type is architecture as a *structural* and *formal* fact, that is, as a complex *experience*.

To revisit Rossi's manifold approach to the problem of the city and its relationship with architecture, particularly during his formative years, also means to challenge the canonical (and simplistic) reading of Rossi as the father of so-called autonomous architecture. In Rossi's view, autonomy is not at all an a priori ideology – a disciplinary distance from contemporary culture – but simply a political and formal position, a preliminary *economy of discourse* rather than the research for a disciplinary self-defense indifferent to its social and political framework. In order to disentangle the complexity of Rossi's development, which is not reducible to disciplinary concerns, I propose to characterize the three phases of his formation with three categories that elucidate his struggle to embrace the difficult whole of the city and architecture.

The first category is *realism*, that is, the attempt, as in Italian neorealist cinema, to document man's life in every dimension of space, time, and place. For Rossi, realism is the

ability to represent this dimension through architectural events. The second category is *rationalism*, or the attempt to establish a highly specific knowledge of a disciplinary landscape that cannot be reduced to simplistic formulas. The third category is *theory*, which for Rossi is an attempt to construct a body of knowledge that serves not only as a recipe for research but is also a teachable methodology. The sequence of these three categories – realism, rationalism, and theory – traces the development of the theory of the difficult whole, a contribution to architectural and urban theory that has thus far been simplistically reduced to all-embracing discursive terms such as *disciplinary autonomy* or *postmodernism*.

REALISM AS THE “BUSINESS OF LIVING”

Cinematography is the only art able to document man’s life in its total dimension of space, time, and place.

– Vasco Pratolini, *Per un saggio sui rapporti fra letteratura e cinema*, 1948.

The education of a great intellectual often includes at the moment of its beginnings not only the seeds of that person’s future development, but often also the final result. In Aldo Rossi’s case, the very first years of his education can be seen as an already conclusive moment in the fundamental cultural choices that mark all of his work.⁶

Rossi’s first crucial experiences were at the Milan Politecnico, where he joined other students in the struggle to radically revise the legacy of the Modern Movement and to recover popular traditions in their aspiration for a new language removed from both the abstraction of late-modernist architecture and the monumentalism that characterized the most excessive forms of architecture in fascist Italy.⁷ Here he also met Ernesto Nathan Rogers, a professor, founding partner of the firm BBPR, and editor-in-chief of *Casabella Continuità*.

In a sense, this moment was a prototype of interdisciplinary education, in which the study of architecture was combined not only with the study of the city, a subject barely established in postwar Italy, but also with other disciplines – art, literature, philosophy, cinema, sociology, urban geography, and, above all, politics. Rossi and his classmates dealt extensively with these disciplines, which were considered essential elements in a potential new *racconto della realtà* (account of reality) being nurtured by the Milanese “Young Turks” as an alternative to the functionalist impasse implicit in the most superficial features of modernism. But it was

6. See Aldo Rossi, “Autobiographical notes on my training, etc., December 1971,” in *Aldo Rossi. Life and Work of an Architect*, Alberto Ferlenga, ed. (Cologne: Konemann, 2001), 24.

7. See Giovanni Durbiano, *I nuovi maestri. Architetti tra politica e cultura nel dopoguerra* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000).

mainly the immediacy of literature and cinema in representing reality through direct experience that, more than architecture, “educated” the young Rossi about the city and its landscape.

Beginning in the 1940s, the discovery and representation of the urban landscape as an index of the actual reality lived by common people was a central theme of cinema and neo-realist literature. In the 1950s, the neorealist movement tried to achieve what, the young critics Mario Alicata and Giovanni de Santis had early on defined as *the “story” as an original and exemplary form of “realism.”*⁸ The idea was to free realism from the simplistic role of a *document* of reality in order to intensify the episodic facts of everyday life as exemplary historical and social cases. Luchino Visconti’s film *Senso* (1954) exemplified the transition from neorealism to a more rigorous form of realism⁹ in depicting the history of Italy’s war of independence through the epic vicissitudes of a private tragedy.¹⁰ This narrative pattern had been adopted earlier in literature. Rossi referred to Cesare Pavese’s novel *Il Compagno* (The Comrade)¹¹ and Visconti’s film *Ossessione* as the cornerstones of his “realist education.”¹² *Il Compagno* represented the most rigorous, politically committed realism, in which the everyday landscape of its unemployed and uneducated protagonist, and his transformation into a communist activist, becomes the archetype for the experience of a generation. Significantly, this transformation takes place against the backdrop of two cities – Rome and Turin – which constitute the dramatic climate of Pavese’s austere realism. The implicit ideological message is deeply reflected in the urban form, which is not represented monumentally, but rather in its implications for daily experience.

It is important to highlight here the two ways in which cinema and literature influenced Rossi’s realist education. On the one hand there is the influence of engagé realism in inspiring the overall act of commitment to the city as a place of everyday life; on the other is a more specific, personal influence on Rossi that leads him to the recognition of everyday urban life through typical figures that coincide with urban images or architectural situations that can be easily identified and coded. Rossi emphasized that his discovery of the architecture of the city occurred in scenes where architecture is something “atmospheric,” a background not reducible to the restrictive characteristics of function and program. Rather, architecture is a daily theater indifferent to, yet participating in, what Pavese defined as *Il mestiere di vivere*: the “business of living.” At the same time, the

8. Alberto Asor Rosa, “Letteratura e Cinema” in *Novecento primo secondo e terzo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1999, 2004), 186.

9. While neorealism was concerned more with the filming of the everyday lives of ordinary people, the aspiration of realism as exemplified in the films of Luchino Visconti was to elevate the “ordinary” to a more conscious and politically militant filmic form. The transition from neorealism to realism was especially due to the increased involvement of the cultural politics of the Italian Communist Party in the film industry. Intellectuals affiliated with the politics of the Communist Party, like Visconti, opposed a more dramatic and epic filmic style, which was instrumental in a more politically committed “representation.”

10. See Giorgio Cavallaro, *Senso* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1977).

11. Cesare Pavese, *Il Compagno* (Turin: Einaudi, 1950).

12. See Aldo Rossi, “Una educazione realista,” in *Aldo Rossi, Opere 1958–1987*, Alberto Ferlenga, ed. (Milan: Electa, 1988), 54.

13. During his lectures, Rossi used to reference cinema in an almost obsessive manner. His passion for cinema is also documented in a movie he himself directed, called *Ornamento e Delitto*, in homage to Adolf Loos's famous essay of the same name. The movie was produced for the XV Milan Triennale, and was made by collaging together different films, especially those by Visconti.

14. Aldo Rossi, "La città e la periferia," *Casabella Continuità*, n. 253 (1961): 45; also in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 173–74. My translation.

15. Aldo Rossi, "Il linguaggio di Perret," *Il Contemporaneo*, n. 33 (1955).

knowledge of the city Rossi gained through film should not be considered a literal preference for the instability of images, filmic verisimilitude, or the narrative and didactic character of film. In his reading of realism in cinema – Visconti's work in particular – Rossi stressed that the problem was to find a formal language that can immediately depict reality in both its *exemplary* and *typical* aspects; a formalized reality in which man's life and habits are a reality that is both temporary and part of a larger structure.¹³

"Pasolini, Visconti, Fellini, and other directors," wrote Rossi, "have expressed the characteristics of the periphery in a much more powerful way than any book on architecture or urbanism could have done. On the one hand, you have the typical landscape of the Roman lower-class districts with their lost, desolate climates, which are nevertheless rich with an inextinguishable vitality, the violence of which puts pressure on the whole city. On the other, you have the Milanese suburbs, where the immigrant is nothing more than a member of the labor force in a system of production in which the best position he can aspire to is the role of consumer. But even if the degradation of Visconti's characters and the desolate lyricism of Fellini's urban landscapes seem far from a desire for change or renewal, the abandonment seen in these images is still able to represent an incommunicable bitterness, and a hard encounter with reality – the changing urban reality of the modern city inhabitant."¹⁴

This sensitivity to the passage from an empirical and documentary *reality as found* to a familiar, repeatable, and typical reality made up of *constituent facts* can be identified as an origin of Rossi's interest in the typological characteristics of architecture. It is also interesting to note that Rossi's first writings concentrated on Soviet realist cinema and the urban language of Auguste Perret, author of the reconstruction of the center of Le Havre.¹⁵ What Rossi seizes in these different works is the will to concentrate social, cultural, and ideological expectations in a single artifact – a panorama of popular suburbs, an architectural monument, or the plan of a city – artifacts that, due to their typicality, are repeatable, and hence instrumental to the construction of a new shared representation of the urban world.

The Soviet cinema seems to suggest to Rossi the transformation from reality as a documentary investigation – a "passion for the real" that permeates the most advanced architectural and urban thinking in the early 1950s – to reality as an uninhibited *story*, that is, reality as a projection of social and cultural expectations that are concretized in

ALDO ROSSI, PHOTOGRAPH OF
KREMLIN SQUARE, MOSCOW, 1954.
COURTESY THE AUTHOR.



16. Rossi analyzes Aleksandr Dovzhenko's film *Michurin*, highlighting the director's realist and naturalist style, so deeply different from Sergei Eisenstein's formalism. What seems to strike Rossi about Dovzhenko's filmic language is the use of the naturalist form of the 19th century – from Balzac to Tolstoy – linked to the recovery of local traditions thought to be the source of strength for the revolutionary mentality promoted by communist ideology. See Aldo Rossi, "La coscienza di poter dirigere la natura," *Voce Comunista* (1954).

17. "My interest in socialist realism helped me rid myself of the entire petit-bourgeois culture of modern architecture: I preferred the alternative of the broad streets of Moscow, the pleasant and provocative architecture of the subway, and the university on Lenin's hills. I saw emotion mixing with a desire to construct a new world. Many people now ask me what that period meant to me, and I believe I have to say, above all, that I became conscious of the possibility that architecture could be unified with popular pride . . . I have always defended the great architecture of the Stalinist period, which could have been transformed into an important alternative for modern architecture but was abandoned for no clear reason." Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 40.

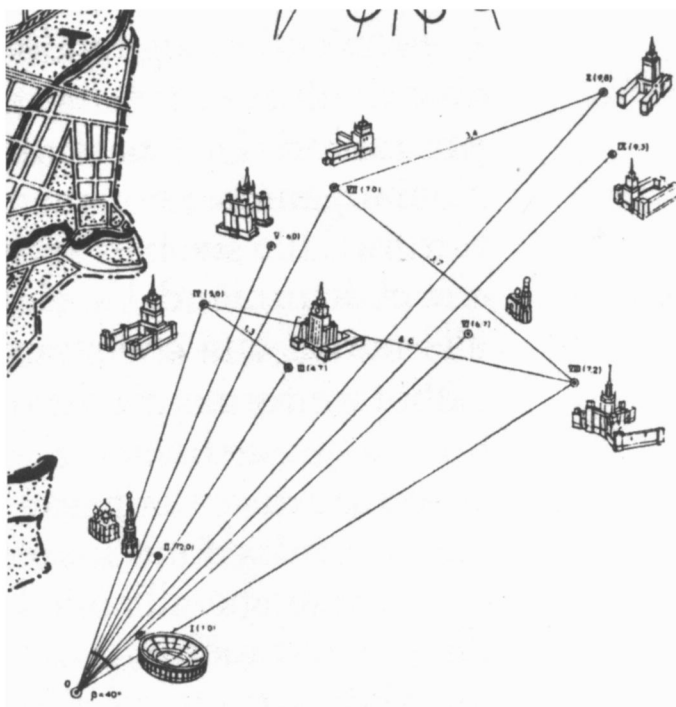
18 In his lectures, Rossi made this statement to explain the classic pastiche staged by Stalinist architecture.

particular and popular historical events.¹⁶ It is in this framework that Rossi seems to appreciate the "sweet and provocative" aspect of Stalinist architecture. In his *A Scientific Autobiography*, and in several lectures, interviews, and short writings, Rossi recalls how a fundamental source of his work was his direct knowledge of Moscow and the architecture of socialist realism, from Stalin to DDR socialist modernism.¹⁷ Two trips – to Moscow in 1955 and to East Berlin in 1961 – were fundamental to Rossi's knowledge of the communist world. What seemed immediately to catch Rossi's attention in Moscow was an architecture that represented the modern image of the city, especially the so-called "Seven Sisters" skyscrapers built in the postwar period, veritable micro-cities that simultaneously took the form of events at a metropolitan scale. In Rossi's opinion, these skyscrapers and the subway stations, with halls designed like fairy-tale palaces, suitably represented the expectations of a population that was not "dreaming through intellectual avant-garde utopias."¹⁸ In lectures, Rossi often mentioned how the big skyscrapers and subway stations represented an archipelago of great urban events, in and of themselves able to "establish" the dimension and form of a city. This is further emphasized in his photographic survey of Moscow, in which he dramatizes the contrast between the huge scale of the skyscrapers and other monumental artifacts with the city itself.

Contrary to many intellectuals who at the time condemned Stalinist architecture as retrograde, Rossi saw



L. RUDNEV, LOMONOSOV UNIVERSITY, MOSCOW, 1949–53. RIGHT: DIAGRAM OF MOSCOW'S "SEVEN SISTERS," FROM *CASABELLA CONTINUATA*, N. 262 (APRIL 1962) ON ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM IN THE SOVIET UNION.



Stalinist architecture as a convincing form for the modern development of the city.¹⁹ His experience in Moscow was his first awareness of the relationship between the character of the city, the political strategies of architecture, and a mode of architectural intervention based on the idea of singular urban events. What Rossi seemed to learn from the provocative style of Moscow's skyscrapers was the possibility of architecture to impose itself as a cultural, built event that evokes shared popular themes. This lesson was largely developed through the influence of philosopher and political thinker Antonio Gramsci on Rossi's generation.

As Giovanni Durbiano has highlighted in recent research on the training of Italian architects in the postwar period, the aspiration to architecture as a *racconto della realtà* was prompted by the strong influence of the cultural positions and choices of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). In 1948 the PCI went through a profound political and cultural turning point after its defeat in the first elections of republican Italy, and with the posthumous publication of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, written during his detainment in fascist prisons.²⁰ Gramsci's ideology found its strength not only in his critique of orthodox Marxism, but also in his advocacy of popular traditions – the cultural, anthropological, and artistic realms – necessary for the establishment of an effective alternative to the power of the bourgeois class.

19. Rossi joined the Communist Party in 1956, after the Red Army invasion of Hungary, an act that was evidence of his convictions.

20. On the relationship between Gramsci's inheritance, the PCI, and Italian culture in general, see Guido Liguori, *Gramsci conteso. Storia di un dibattito 1922–1996* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996).



ANTONIO GRAMSCI.

21. Ironically and polemically called “Giovani delle Colonne” (*Youth of the Columns*) by Giancarlo De Carlo, this informal group of students found the popular and civic built expressions of neoclassicism to be a far more “progressive” and politically committed architectural ideology than functionalism. See Gian Carlo De Carlo, “Problemi concreti per i giovani delle colonne,” *Casabella Continuità*, n. 204 (1955).

22. See Durbiano, *I nuovi maestri*, particularly the first chapter, “L’invenzione delle tradizioni,” 15–55.

23. Aldo Rossi, “Speech at the International Conference of Students of Architecture,” in *Special Supplement of National Union of Students* (Praha: Transcription, 1954), 1.

24. *Ibid.*, 2.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

According to Gramsci, the role of intellectuals was one of mediation between the language of popular tradition and the institutional cultural apparatus. The “Giovani delle Colonne,”²¹ the group of Milan Politecnico students to which Rossi, Guido Canella, Vittorio Gregotti, Giuseppina Marcialis, and others belonged, defended popular tradition as a “current of reality” opposed to the formalist and metaphysical abstraction of the Modern Movement.²²

Gramsci’s combination of the participatory spirit promoted by the Communist revolution, the analytical approach of intellectuals, and the study of popular cultural traditions immediately appealed to Rossi and his generation, who saw this as an alternative to the rhetoric of abstraction and cosmopolitanism imposed by the International Style. Young architects like Rossi identified the cosmopolitanism Gramsci criticized with the stylistic drift of the International Style. As Rossi said, it was “a rhetorical and evasive formalism” with which the International Style tried to metabolize and remove the “decay of bourgeois society.”²³

A young Rossi said these words in his speech at the Architettura Moderna e Tradizioni Nazionali conference, organized by the International Union of Students and held in Rome in April 1954. The conference was the first official occasion for debate among the new generation, and the influence of Gramsci’s thought was apparent. Rossi’s talk was clearly inspired by Gramsci’s ideas, as were the speeches by Carlo Aymonino and Francesco Tentori. Although different in tone, each restated Gramsci’s theme of “culture as a moral life,” which, in an architectural framework, became a form deeply inspired by popular aspirations and the real needs of the common man’s life.

While Aymonino naively identified the new, popular content as being in “social centers, in the outskirts of Lombardy, in the buildings of the cooperatives of Emilia Romagna, in the council houses of the Tuscany Provinces,” Rossi seemed to alert architectural culture to the external misappropriation of reality through a “didactic, thematic, neorealist”²⁴ architecture. In essence, Rossi criticized the reconstruction of picturesque social content through formal effects. He suggested a critical commitment to the deeper “historical adherence and substantial morality of architecture, as it was conceived and morally interpreted by Terragni and Pagano.”²⁵ According to Rossi, the realist attitude was not intended as a formal *mimesis*, but as the deep adherence of architectural language to man’s historical reality, in which “men’s responsibility to their history” can be read.²⁶

Though he did not give specific examples, Rossi suggested that a break with the Modern Movement could only take place at the stylistic level, not at the programmatic one.

Tentori, who later collaborated with Rossi in his first important urban project – the restructuring of a part of the outskirts of Milan, around Via Farini (1960) – spoke of a substantial continuity with “the moral attitude of the Modern Movement” (which Rossi had only suggested): “It is necessary to continue the housing analysis started by the architects of German rationalism, which can only but lead to the evidence of social living, to the abandonment of formal spatial volumetric ideas that have never belonged to common men.”²⁷ The German rationalists’ research on housing appeared to Tentori and Rossi to be a modern architecture removed from stylistic anxiety and directed at general themes deeply linked with social reality.

The realism implicit in the severe architecture of the German *Siedlung*, whose formal aspect was different from the more experimental character of the French and Dutch modernist architecture of the 1920s, was seen by Rossi and Tentori as an architectural analogue to what Georg Lukács, in his *Studies in European Realism*, defined as a fundamental characteristic of realism: the concept of *suitability*.²⁸ Tentori developed a research program that went beyond mirroring social themes via an *architecture parlante*, anticipating Rossi’s idea of type as a point of encounter between man’s needs, architectural invention, and the form of the city.

This idea appeared in Rossi’s first important theoretical contribution, written at the age of 25: “Il concetto di Tradizione nel Neoclassicismo Milanese” (The Concept of Tradition in Milanese Neoclassicism).²⁹ The central theme of this sociological study of form was the concept of tradition, which Rossi considered “the free choice of what history offered, the acceptance of an order within which it was possible to derive a wider, newer order through rational criticism of what had previously been done.”³⁰ Rossi then overlaps the concept of tradition with the concept of history to suggest the “science of the birth of the present.”³¹ “In order for architecture to have a greater effect and be discussed and criticized outside of a limited group of specialists,” Rossi wrote, “there must be a broad, progressive movement within society and an interest in public space that, already in itself, is an index of freedom.”³² According to Rossi, public space as motivation for a new space of enlightenment, and freedom as the acknowledgment of civil rights, could be represented in a rational architecture.

27. Tentori, *Special Supplement*, 4.

28. Georg Lukács, *Studies in European Realism* (London: Hilway Publishing Co., 1950).

29. Aldo Rossi, “Il concetto di Tradizione nel Neoclassicismo Milanese,” *Società*, n. 3 (1956). Also in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 1–24.

30. *Ibid.*, 11.

31. A concept derived from a definition by Joachim Ritter, cited by Carlo Luporini in *Voltaire e le Lettres philosophiques. Il concetto di storia nell’illuminismo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1955). Rossi paraphrased Luporini’s title for his essay on neoclassicism.

32. Rossi, “Il concetto di Tradizione nel Neoclassicismo Milanese,” 9.

It is important, however, to emphasize that Rossi identified the austere character of works such as Luigi Cagnola's Arco Sempione or Giovanni Antolini's Foro Bonaparte not as a proposal for a formal and metaphysical style, but rather as a proposal for a rational language, a language of experience more suitable to be shared as an intersubjective principle of the city. In this sense, Rossi echoes Ludovico Geymonat's philosophical thinking, which, between the 1940s and '50s, introduced the themes of rationalist thinking and the philosophy of science in Italy.³³

33. Rossi quoted Geymonat in his review of Fracoise Cali's *L'ordre Grec*. Aldo Rossi, "L'ordine Greco," review of François Cali, *L'ordre Grec*, Paris, 1958, *Casabella Continuità*, n. 228 (1959). Also in Rossi, *Scritti scelti*. The most important book by Ludovico Geymonat is *Studi per un nuovo Razionalismo* (Turin: Chiantore, 1945).

According to Geymonat, the epistemic horizon of reason is the "consciousness to govern nature" on the basis of universal moral principles. Geymonat considered the austerity of reason not as neutral and abstract, but as a critical apparatus deeply shared by individuals in their daily experience, something that originates at the heart of critical consciousness. For reason to be understood, it is necessary to establish a value that might be universally accepted. This value, according to Geymonat, is the concept of freedom, which he identified as a modality of relations between individuals, civic institutions, and the institutions of knowledge that define the forms of coexistence.

Rossi reconsiders the rationalism of neoclassical architecture and of the Modern Movement along a similar line of thinking. In Rossi's view, the development of architecture from neoclassicism to the Modern Movement represented an aspiration to shared values like freedom, which he believed was revealed in the ruling class's interest in the *res publica* – in the space that potentially represents the needs of everyone. Rossi's interest in typology begins to develop from this idea of architecture.

RATIONALISM

Rossi's interest in typology did not directly derive from the study of classical sources, such as the theoretical work of J.N.L. Durand and Quatremere de Quincy. In his theoretical development, typological study evolved gradually through a vast and heterogeneous series of articles, reviews, and conferences, and could not be reduced to a single definition. It emerged in Rossi's critical work through his close attention to the needs of architecture as an urban phenomenon freed from theoretical and methodological prejudices and restored to its concrete and rational dimension.

The framework in which Rossi developed the basis for a typological study was his collaboration with *Casabella Continuità*, edited by Ernesto Rogers from 1958 to 1964.

Rogers held a unique position within the discourse on architecture and the city in postwar Europe insofar as he was attempting to formulate a critique of modernism that rejected both the simplistic dismissal of the legacy of the Modern Movement and the banal embrace of that legacy as a generic ideal of technological and stylistic progress. Rogers pushed the young collaborators of *Casabella* – Rossi, Gregotti, Tentori, Gae Aulenti, and Canella – to study anomalous figures of modernity whose work had challenged the canonical reading of architectural modernity.

Rossi used his monographic studies on Perret, Loos, and Peter Behrens, and his reviews of books by Sigfried Giedion and Hans Sedlmayr, or on topics such as Art Nouveau and the architecture of the French Enlightenment, to broaden and complexify the critical and interpretative apparatus of modern architecture, which at that time was still limited to the mainstream International Style and narratives of the great masters.³⁴ In developing an alternative reading to the master narratives, particularly within the landscape of his diverse interests, which included urban geography, economics, and politics, Rossi began to see the idea of type as a critical and operational device for establishing an underlying thematic reading of architecture and its confrontation with the problematic of the city. The conceptual essentiality of type appeared to Rossi to be a useful reading device with which to go through the complex system of references that he established as a basis for critical work and a theory of architecture.

For Rossi, the idea of type explained the interest some architects had in repeatable and interpretable forms, not as mass production but in a more ideal sense, as the ability to think of the city as a *whole* through the specific practice of a simplified vocabulary of architectural forms. Rossi's interest in metropolitan anonymity, which he supported with Loos's "normalized" architecture and polemical writings against ornament, became an opportunity to state that the purism of both Loos and modern architecture was not a search for a metaphysical detachment from reality but for a deeper attachment to the anonymous and abstract character of the modern city. In this sense, Rossi found Le Corbusier's concept, "the house is a machine for living in," to be "the most revolutionary statement of architecture, the one with the most real content from a scientific point of view."³⁵ The architectural culture of the early '60s, however, was highly dismissive of the more conventional, totalizing attitudes of modern architecture. In this atmosphere, Rossi attempted to emphasize the movement of architecture toward the general

34. See Aldo Rossi, "A proposito di un recente studio sull'Art Nouveau," review of S. Tschudi Madsen, *Source of Art Nouveau*, Oslo, 1956, *Casabella Continuità*, n. 215 (1958); "Una Critica che Respingiamo," review of Hans Sedlmayr, *La rivoluzione dell'arte moderna*, Milano, 1958, *Casabella Continuità*, n. 219 (1958); "Emil Kaufmann e l'architettura dell'Illuminismo," *Casabella Continuità*, n. 222 (1958); Review of Sigfried Giedion, *Architecture you and me*, Cambridge, 1958, *Casabella Continuità*, n. 238 (1960).
35. Aldo Rossi, "I problemi Tipologici e la Residenza," in *Scritti Scelti*, 233.

and structural problems of the city, problems that were related to architectural expressions.

According to Rossi, architecture that showed awareness of the problems of the modern city could be seen in the work of Alessandro Antonelli, Behrens, Loos, Hannes Meyer, and Atelier 5. Their work finds its language in the empirical ground of urban reality, from which the practice of architecture extrapolates the principles of its development. In this sense, one of the most concise definitions of typology, considered a fundamental link between the reality of the city and the concreteness of the architectural event, is found in the essay on Behrens that Rossi co-authored with his colleague Gianugo Polesello.³⁶

Behrens' work appears to Rossi and Polesello as stylistically eclectic but consistent in the development of fundamental urban themes. "Behrens built relatively few urbanistic works," they wrote, "nonetheless, in the characteristic monumentality of his great complexes there is a profound link with the city; great works such as the Mannesman factory in Düsseldorf or the Farben offices in Frankfurt are clearly developed around the form of the street."³⁷ Rossi will later ascribe this concept to the idea of the urban event, that is, that an architectural form takes a *typical* element of the city and develops it as an exceptional one.

Here it is possible to see how, for Rossi, typological study, as a form of *rational* study, was based not on normative facts but on the possibility of architectural form to evoke urban themes. Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation in Marseille with its *rue intérieure*, or the Smithsons' project for the Golden Lane residential complex in London and its "streets in the air," are among the examples Rossi considered true representations of the city in the form of urban themes.³⁸ Here, type is rendered not through universal rules but by the immediacy and singularity of an architectural event.

ARCHITECTURE VS. URBAN PLANNING: ROSSI VS. TAFURI

Rossi's position was strongly based on architecture as a basic, yet partial unit of the city. This was particularly polemical in the early '60s, when architects saw emerging urbanity largely through the lens of urban-planning methodologies. In 1963, the Olivetti Foundation organized an urban planning seminar in Arezzo, headed by Ludovico Quaroni, Giancarlo De Carlo, and Edoardo Detti, in which Rossi participated as an instructor, along with other young architects, including the 28-year-old Manfredo Tafuri.³⁹

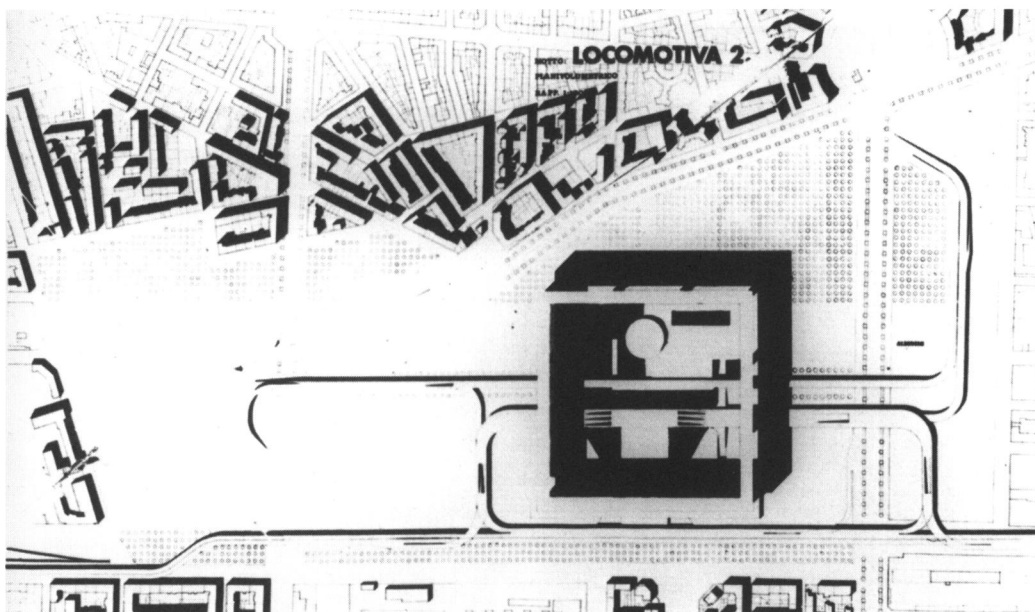
Based on his experience at AUA (Architetti Urbanisti

36. Aldo Rossi, Gianugo Polesello, "Peter Behrens e il problema dell'abitazione moderna," *Casabella Continuità*, n. 240 (1960); also in *Scritti scelti*, 107-11.

37. *Ibid.*, 107

38. Rossi, *The Architecture of the City*, 45.

39. Manfredo Tafuri, a 1960 graduate of the Faculty of Architecture in Rome, was developing in the framework of urbanism and planning his first important historical, critical, and theoretical contributions, including a special issue of *Casabella*, edited with Giorgio Piccinato and Vieri Quilici, on City-Territory, and his first book, on modern Japanese architecture, in which he paid special attention to the urban-planning work of Kenzo Tange and the Metabolists. See Manfredo Tafuri, *L'architettura moderna in Giappone* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1964); see also Tafuri, "Un piano per Tokio e le nuove problematiche urbanistica contemporanea," *Argomenti di Architettura*, n. 4 (1961). For a comparison of Rossi's and Tafuri's positions on the city, see Alice Bulla, "Inheritances," unpublished paper presented at the Architectural Reflection Seminar, TUDelft, 2004-2005.



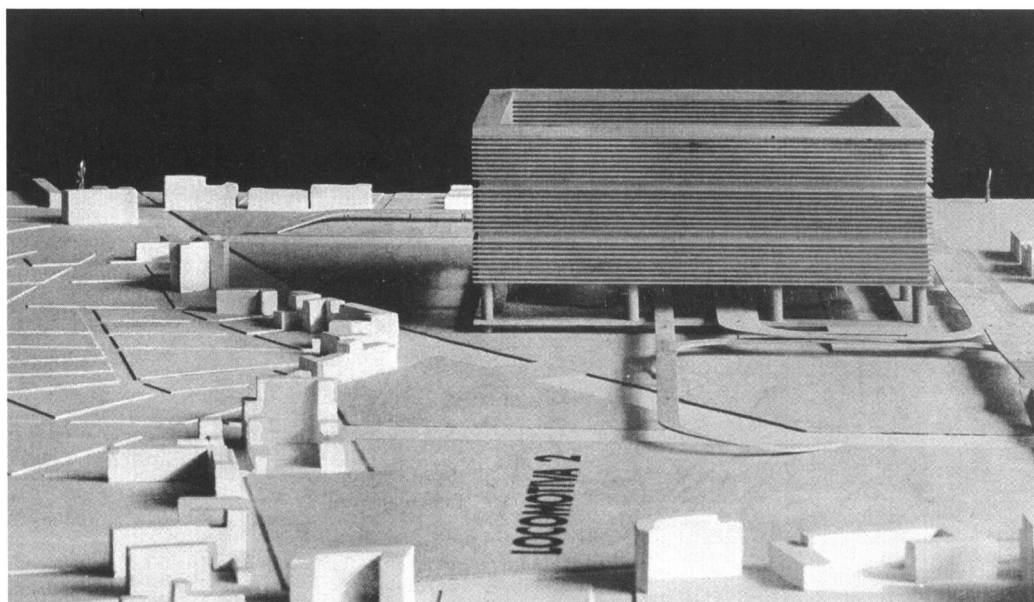
ALDO ROSSI, GIANUGO POLESSELLO, LUCA MEDA, CENTRO DIREZIONALE COMPETITION ENTRY. TURIN, ITALY, 1962. PLAN AND MODEL. *DOMUS* MAGAZINE CALLED THE PROPOSAL A "STALINIST COURTYARD FOR MASS EXECUTIONS." COURTESY THE AUTHOR.

Associati), an architectural and urban planning practice he cofounded in Rome with Vieri Quilici and Giorgio Piccinato, Tafuri proposed a greater degree of integration between urban planning and design as the agenda for the seminar. This reflected an emerging tendency in architecture for a more organic collaboration between architects and other disciplines to facilitate a more integrated and collective planning method that would grasp the new dimension of the city-region. Responding to the new political, social, and cultural challenges of the city-region concept, Tafuri, Piccinato, and Quilici introduced the concept of *city-territory*, a search for a new scale of urban planning in which urbanism absorbed the informality and openness of new geographic, economic, and political structures.⁴⁰ This new perspective on urban-planning methodologies could be seen as partially inspired by the wave of hope for urban planning generated by the first center-left-wing government in Italy in 1963, and the full affirmation of the welfare state in Europe. The seminar in Arezzo, as participant Bruno Gabrielli later recalled, was "a sort of fine-tuning of the themes and problems to be faced in order to relaunch proactive planning in Italy."⁴¹ But for Rossi, the seminar, which he always recalled as his passage from research to theory, and the most decisive experience in his education,⁴² became an opportunity to radically question urban planning as a discipline itself. Confronting Tafuri's view of urban planning as a new dimension for architectural practice, Rossi accused urban planning of representing nothing but a discursive and ideological practice,

40. Giorgio Piccinato, Vieri Quilici, Manfredo Tafuri, "La città Territorio verso una nuova dimensione," *Casabella Continuità*, n. 270 (1963).

41. Bruno Gabrielli, "Una esperienza con Aldo Rossi," in *Per Aldo Rossi*, Salvatore Farinato, ed. (Venezia: Marsilio, 1997), 63.

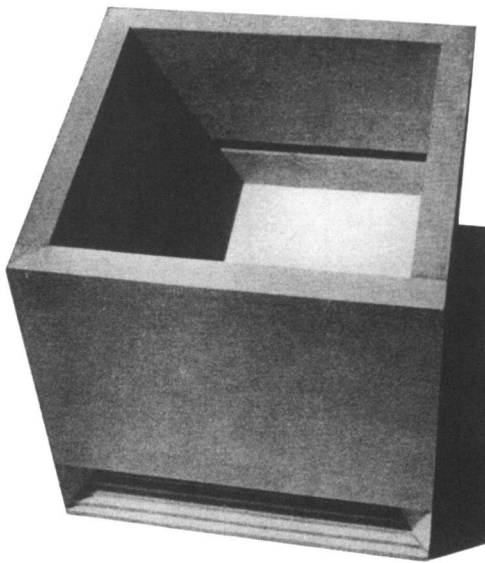
42. Ibid.



43. Gabrielli, 64.

without any actual tools or immediate commitment to the real problems of the city. As Gabrielli recalled, Rossi strongly criticized the vague foundations of the urban-planning reforms proposed by Quaroni, De Carlo, and Tafuri, as well as the most fashionable urban methodologies of the time, such as the notions of city-region and megastructure, to the point where the seminar became deadlocked.⁴³ Rossi's reintroduction of the architectural dimension of the city did not represent the recovery of a historical form, as is commonly maintained, but rather a search for the concreteness of objects as opposed to the vagueness of planning. Rossi made clear that the analysis and project of the city had to go beyond the totalizing, demiurgic, and diagrammatic attitude of planning, which he believed was too general and simplistic for confronting the reality of an urban territory irreducible to an abstract common denominator. His critique of urban planning was clearly opposed to the position of Tafuri, who, at the beginning of his career, assumed that the scale of regional planning and megastructure was the only means for architecture to identify itself with the new problems of contemporary cities.

Thus Rossi radicalized not only the continuation of the trajectory of the Modern Movement, but also an idea of architecture as a circumscribed and realized phenomenon, as an element of concreteness and empirical rationality upon which it is possible to project a personal commitment to reality. This was clearly manifested in the early, highly polemical architectural projects that Rossi was developing in



ALDO ROSSI, GIANUGO POLESELLO, LUCA MEDA, MODEL FOR THE MONUMENT TO THE RESISTANCE COMPETITION ENTRY. CUNEO, ITALY, 1962. A SECTION DRAWING OF THE PROPOSAL APPEARED ON THE COVER OF *CASABELLA CONTINUITÀ*.



collaboration with Luca Meda and Gianugo Polesello, which he presented in Arezzo as “didactic demonstrations” of his argument. Working against the early ’60s fashions of iconic exuberance, total design, and the naïve use of technology and cybernetics as techniques of urban design, Rossi and his colleagues developed an elementary architectural vocabulary of simple forms that would merge monumentality and the common experience of the everyday urban landscape. Projects such as their competition entry for the Monument to the Resistance in Cuneo (1962), the entry for a monumental fountain in the new Centro Direzionale in Milan (1962), and the impressive Locomotiva 2, a competition entry for the new Centro Direzionale in Turin (1962), showed an intense detachment from the formal complexity of urban design typical of that time, and a predisposition for a zero-degree formal language that aspired to be a stage for urban life rather than its infrastructure or iconic representation. These projects summarized Rossi’s idea of architecture as event, interacting with the complexity of the city through the extreme simplicity and finitude of its form. Rossi and Polesello later wrote a polemical text against the fashion of “open form” as a metaphor for the total design of the city: “Only a defined and finite form, by virtue of its clear limits, allows for its *continuity* and for the production of further actions and the adaptation to unpredictable events.”⁴⁴ On several occasions Rossi maintained that an architectural intervention always takes the form of a subjective decision to confront the existing context rather than to overcome it.

44. Aldo Rossi, Emilio Mattioni, Gianugo Polesello, Luciano Semerani, “Città e Territorio negli aspetti funzionali e figurativi della pianificazione continua,” *Proceedings of the X Congress of INU, Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica* (Trieste, 1965). My translation.

This decision, however, is not arbitrary, but relies on a specific and shared methodology that, while it becomes concrete through individual examples, always represents the diversity and traces of an intersubjective knowledge of the city. This is why at this moment Rossi felt the urgency to systematize his intuition on typology into a “scientific” framework. The Arezzo confrontation between Rossi and De Carlo, Quaroni, and Tafuri was one of the fundamental provocations that seemed to push Rossi to further define his field of theoretical action around the idea of typology as both a concrete and a general criteria of analysis and design.

FOR A THEORY ON ARCHITECTURE AND THE CITY

The publication of Rossi’s first essays on typology in 1964 coincided with three important events in his career: the end of his collaboration with *Casabella Continuità* after Rogers was fired for encouraging leftist views; a grant to conduct urban research on Milan, offered by De Carlo; and the beginning of a university chair at the Istituto di Architettura di Venezia (IUAV), which he took on as an assistant professor. These three synchronistic events converged in Rossi’s decision to further his work on typology as a theoretical method.

In his teaching at Venice, Rossi systematized his research methods, until then based only on rough and discontinuous editorial work, in the form of a *teachable* theory. Now typological analysis becomes the main focus of Rossi’s thinking; thought that on the one hand aspires to treatiselike rigor and on the other is constantly focused on the intermediate and uncertain scale that joins architecture and the city, analysis and design, in a difficult whole.

Luciano Semerani, a professor at IUAV and Rossi’s close friend, recalls that “in a confrontation in nearby classrooms with Giuseppe Samonà, then dean of IUAV, Aldo gave a few improvised lectures on type . . . [Samonà] maintained that typological study concerned a possible intermediate element between sensible and intelligible, between form and content. . . . Aldo, on the other hand, referred to studies of geography and natural science, and to anthropological interpretations of life and human culture that see the coincidence between species and forms as having an inbred, predetermined structure. Both Rossi and Samonà were aware of Saverio Muratori, who was the first to reintroduce the notion of type at IUAV, where the subject had been previously reduced to statistical surveys and professional manuals.”⁴⁵

To understand how Rossi established his notion of type, attention should briefly be given to the idea Muratori

45. Luciano Semerani, “Arrivi e Partenze,” in *Aldo Rossi, Il Teatro e la Città* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 2003), 9.

46. See Giorgio Pigafetta, *Saverio Muratori architetto. Teoria e progetti* (Marsilio: Venezia, 1990), 103. My translation. Born in Modena in 1910, Muratori began with a series of projects (often in collaboration with Ludovico Quaroni and Luigi Fariello) in which rational language is strongly reformed through the recovery of severe, classic forms that bring his work close to the Scandinavian classicism of Gunnar Asplund. In the postwar period, with his commitment to planning public housing and teaching at the IUAV, Muratori began to deepen the fundamental core of his work: Type as an *a priori synthesis*.

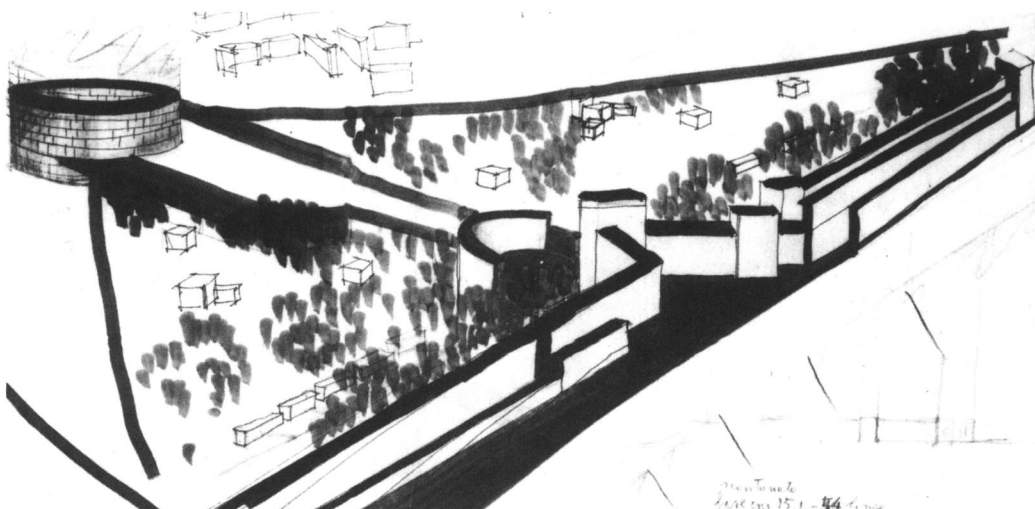
47. Pigafetta, 104.

48. Saverio Muratori quoted in Pigafetta, *Saverio Muratori architetto*, 123.

49. Muratori, quoted in Pigafetta, 15.

developed while teaching in Venice and Rome.⁴⁶ In Muratori's view, type is not something to be classified and selected, then adopted or neglected, but rather a "structure of permanent relations" that single initiatives simply adopt through a *unitary and synthetic* consciousness.⁴⁷ For Muratori, architects do not create but *invent*, in its original meaning "to find," rediscovering and developing what the city itself offers. If we accept this idea, then we also have to accept that in the evolutionary processes of the city there can be no fractures between a *before* and an *after*, unless personal, deliberately metaphysical, nihilist attitudes are imposed that are not coherent with the substance that constitutes urban structure.

During the early 1960s, while he was teaching in Rome, Muratori's radical, intransigent, and absolute position elicited strong attacks in the debate on architecture and the city during this time of intense urban transformation. In response to students who demanded transfer from his class and to the group of young assistant professors who led the attacks (among them, Tafuri and Piccinato), Muratori said, "You think that I'm stuck on some formulas since you see them from the *outside*. On the contrary, we have been living on these things, we witness a *given reality* growing up under our eyes, we find that it is the *true reality*, the one we are looking for, and that it is getting lost under the camouflage of crystallized theories."⁴⁸ Muratori's notion of type was a strictly methodological and radically antitheoretical position that attempted to recover the wholeness of the construction of the city by finding within it an intelligible, formative unity that exists beyond abstract schemes, models, metaphysical ideas, or images. "We need to acquire a sharper understanding of architecture and any form of art," he wrote, "by freeing ourselves from the assumption that the artifact is only a moment, an episode in time. This is a conception of art dear to the romantics. On the contrary, we need to embrace the whole reality of a building as a manifestation of a collective formal intuition – i.e., as types – which contribute to a particular architectural environment. This means that we have to conceive of individual architectural expressions in all of their phases of development, each of which adopts a previous form and includes it as an integral part in a new and more elaborate structure able to encompass and express a whole history and tradition."⁴⁹ Like it or not, Muratori had formulated the strictest definition of type; Rossi's formulation of the idea of typology, while very different from Muratori's, will use his work as a fundamental point of reference.



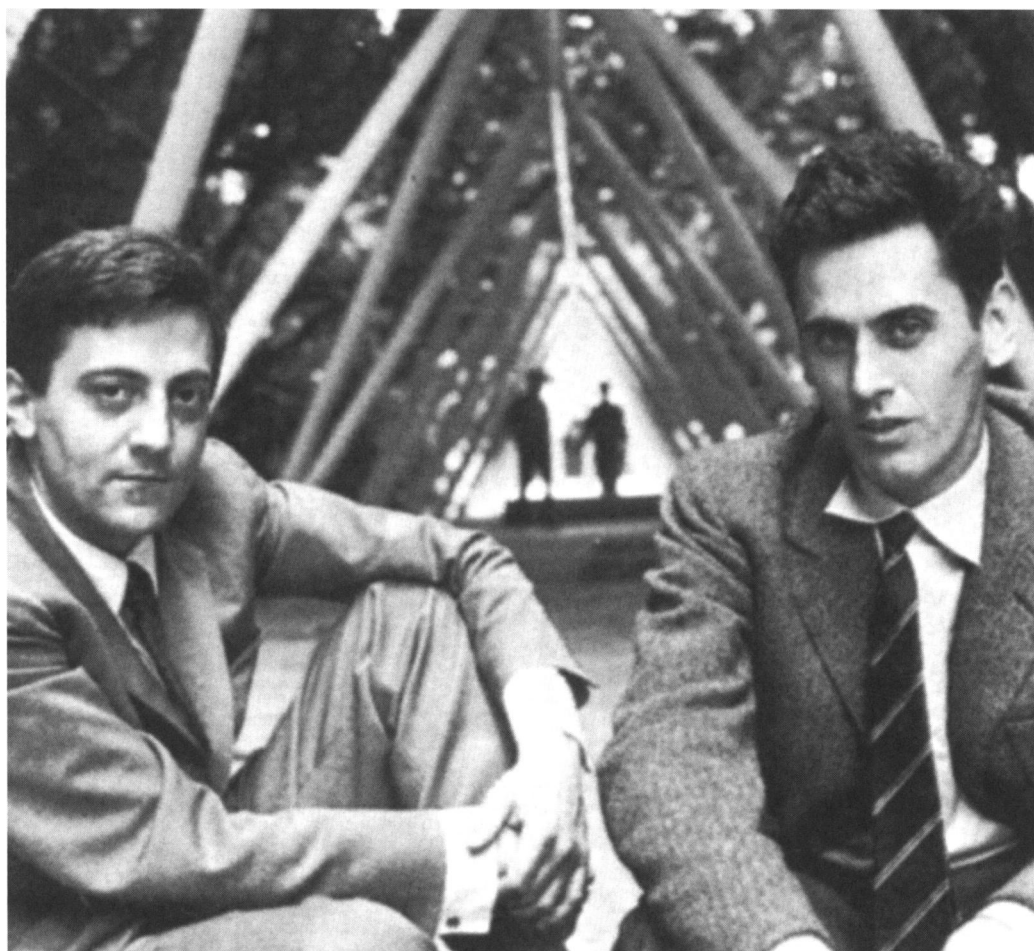
ALDO ROSSI, STUDY SKETCH FOR URBAN RENEWAL ALONG VIA FARINI IN MILAN, 1960. PROJECT WITH GIUANUGO POLESSELLO AND FRANCESCO TENTORI. COURTESY THE AUTHOR.

What moved Rossi and Muratori toward a theory of architecture based on the idea of type as a “sharp understanding of architecture,” freeing architectural language from the iconic and episodic character of the occasional creative “gesture,” was a search for a nonconsumable architectural form immanent to the life of the city. For both, typological study as a science of the city was a search for its vital characteristics, which persist despite the qualitative and quantitative variations in urban form with the passage of time; it was the search for an architectural language based on the life of the city. However, whereas Muratori based his typological studies on an organic idea of the city, in which the collective dimension of *dwelling* is totalizing to the point of denying the individuality and originality of architectural intervention, for Rossi, typological study represented a more composite framework that becomes real only in its application, in the singularity of a decision, and in the singularity of the urban event.

Muratori’s typological research involved case studies of cities such as Venice, which he and his team of researchers mapped in their physical entirety, both topographically and architecturally.⁵⁰ Rossi, by contrast, based his typological study on particular and limited facts. While Muratori chose the Gothic fabric of Venice as a paradigm of a continuous urban organism, Rossi chose Berlin, where typological evolution was clearly illustrated by discernible architectural artifacts such as Schinkel’s villas, the rationalist *Siedlungen*, and the *Stalinallee*, a two-kilometer-long street and urban design intervention that Rossi admired as the “last European street.”⁵¹ “More or less consciously,” he said, “the *Stalinallee* is proposed only for this part of Berlin, conceding that the

50. See Saverio Muratori, *Studi per una operante storia urbana di Venezia* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1960).

51. See Aldo Rossi, “Aspetti della Tipologia residenziale a Berlino,” *Casabella Continuità*, n.288 (1964). Also in *Scritti scelti*, 237–52.



52. Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 249.

city is made up of different facts that emerge at different times; only these precise facts are controllable elements.”⁵² Unlike Muratori’s concept of organic wholeness, Rossi constructed the whole of the city through the discrete composition of different parts which may be repeatable but are in themselves strongly *individual* and therefore finite. Once again, typology as a general event and the urban event as a universal yet individual element overlap in the way Rossi imagines the project of the modern city. Later, in the research he conducted on Milan, Rossi was forced to define typological study more deeply in relationship to the composite character of the modern urban fabric. In mapping a typical area of Milan, Rossi was again faced with an empirical datum in which any general statement also had to come to terms with something real and particular.

In analyzing Rossi’s sources and references, it is commonly misunderstood that Rossi proposed a return to traditional urban forms. In fact, he proposed a research model

OPPOSITE: ALDO ROSSI (LEFT) WITH LUCA MEDA AT THE OPENING OF THE XIII MILAN TRIENNALE, 1964, SITTING IN FRONT OF THE TRIANGULAR IRON BRIDGE THEY DESIGNED FOR THE ENTANCE TO THE EXHIBITION. COURTESY THE AUTHOR.

that did not have a preference for one urban form over another, but rather took into consideration a more fundamental problem, namely, that the definition of an urban plan might only proceed from the analysis of the existing conditions, whether “old” or “new.” If in the Modern Movement typology was the search for new forms of the city, in Rossi’s view, only the existing city can be the real framework for research in which to develop the premises of urban form. The urban landscape that emerges from Rossi’s attempts to describe the city is at once irreducible to a unique and finite form and yet open to meaningful representation in discrete urban areas. The more these sections were specified dimensionally (elements such as the street, the building, the district), the more it was possible to sharpen the basis for a precise urban analysis without falling into abstract categories. Nevertheless, the tension between the general and the particular in Rossi’s theory of the city remains unresolved. The difficulty, if not impossibility, of achieving a straightforward architectural method in response to the real and continuing evolution of the city, as well as the desire to construct a theory that makes the relationship between architecture and city intelligible, finally emerges in his first definitive attempts to theorize typology.

To develop a definition of the concept of typology, Rossi wrote five pieces in the form of lecture notes, which were published in the reader for his course at the IUAV.⁵³ But he never conclusively defined type apart from in these unpublished writings, which were offered as theories developed only within his concept of the relationship between architecture and the city. In “Considerations on the relationship between urban morphology and building typology,” for example, Rossi clearly expressed a framework for typological studies as the urban landscape, or an empirical experience of the city seen in its existing forms. Here, Rossi recovered a classic thesis from French urban geographers like Georges Chabot, who saw the problem of city functions not as an organizational pattern but as an initial datum evolving toward a more complex and blurred relationship, and thus moving away from modernist techniques of urban zoning.⁵⁴ He also came closer to the approach to the city developed by Kevin Lynch and later used by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott-Brown. For Rossi, typological research must document the empirical reality of the urban landscape and not be immediately invested with particular ideologies or metaphysics.

In this sense, the publication of Lynch’s *The Image of the City* in Italian represented a provocative challenge for Rossi.⁵⁵

53. “Considerations on the relationship between urban morphology and building typology” (1964), “Typological problems and housing” (1964), “Methodological problems of urban research” (1965), “Typology, manuals, and architecture” (1966), and “The city as fundamental for the study of buildings” (1966). These essays are now published in Italian in Aldo Rossi, *Scritti scelti*.

54. See Georges Chabot, *Les Villes* (Gallimard: Paris, 1948).

55. Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960). The Italian edition, published by Marsilio, was translated by Paolo Ceccarelli, a professor at IUAV, an instructor at the Arezzo seminar, and Rossi’s close friend.

Lynch's attempt to theorize the empirical description of the urban experience through a systematic coding of the *image* of the urban landscape seems to have strongly affected Rossi, who replaces Lynch's *image* with *architecture* as a final representation of the experience of the city. *The architecture of the city*, therefore, aimed to go beyond the perceptual and psychological empirical elements on which Lynch's method was based by concentrating on the formal and structural aspects of the urban phenomenon.

Rossi used typological knowledge in order to empirically represent these structural and formal aspects of the city. In this sense, urban morphology was not a simple formal rendering of the urban fabric, but the envisioning of the logical structure of relationships through which the city as a whole evolves. According to Rossi, identifying this logical structure of relationships would not transform them into general and totalizing statements. "What could be done," Rossi said, "is to adopt a language that allows us to talk about the phenomena that make up our field of analysis with a concreteness that almost exclusively belongs to the empirical sciences – without categories that, from a scientific point of view, are too general – and to perform a survey with the focus that is typical of the empirical method of science."⁵⁶ From Rossi's perspective, affirming this position meant grasping, through an analytical view of architecture and the city, the essence of the realist legacies of the Modern Movement in order to find the underlying intersections between ways of living, material conditions, and architectural form. "Such an idea of architecture," said Rossi, "can be derived from the main lines of architectural thinking, from the great writers of treatises in the Enlightenment period to the scholars of 19th-century positivism to the main interpreters of the Modern Movement in architecture."⁵⁷ In Rossi's view, this continuity meant first purifying the typological inheritance of the Modern Movement from external elements, such as the imposition of standards. "Confusion often occurs between the datum as a tool and the datum as an optimal measure or standard. In this case, the datum almost becomes an ideological foundation, which can lead to serious distortions."⁵⁸ For Rossi, "A building typology is concretely determined by problems relating to land division, the formation of lots, building regulations, and the needs of daily life. The relationship between these factors can be established through different forms, since they are all disrupted by radical changes in life, in the same way that radical changes subvert the form of the city."⁵⁹

56. Rossi, *Scritti scelti*, 210–11.

57. Aldo Rossi, "Tipologia, Manualistica, Architettura," in *Scritti scelti*, 299.

58. *Scritti scelti*, 307.

59. Aldo Rossi, "Contributo al problema dei rapporti tra tipologia edilizia e morfologia urbana. Esame di una area studio a Milano," in *Scritti scelti*, 256.

CONCLUSIONS

Rossi wrote of concreteness, radical change, society, and daily life: however, as the titles of two of his Venice essays show, he insisted on the word *problem*. Rossi was not interested in proposing a methodological recipe to build a coherent and linear research program. In his development of a typological study of the existing city, he no longer viewed the city as a problem to solve, but rather as a problematic on which to base a more *realist* attitude toward the project of the city. For Rossi, only with such an attitude was it possible to define the character of buildings as particular expressions fully invested with the empirical experience of the city itself. It was at this moment, when Rossi assembled the difficult whole into a theory, that the legacy of the Modern Movement was surpassed. This did not occur at the level of ideology or style, but rather as a fundamental question regarding the acceptance of the existing urban landscape as a theoretical plane; a plane in which the project does not impose a new concept of habitable space, but rather acknowledges, explains, and thus retroactively justifies what already exists. This was not a passive exercise but an active one, in which interpretation provided the space in which to invent the city. And one that Rossi himself, starting from the architecture of the city, later began to identify with the concept of *locus*.

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